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Portugal: A Step Closer to Civil War 29 Aug 75

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

29 August 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President
(National Security Affairs)

SUBJECT : Intelligence Alert Memorandum:
Portugal: A Step Closer to Civil War

1. We are concerned that Portugal moved a step closer to civil war today with the appointments of Admiral Azevedo as Prime Minister and Vasco Goncalves as Armed Forces Chief of Staff. The anti-Communist faction of Melo Antunes must now decide either to try to overthrow this new arrangement--as it previously said it would--or forfeit any chance to change the direction in which the country is headed. The outcome also will have major implications for the future of the Azores and Madeira.

2. Ambassador Carlucci reported, even before the new appointments were announced, that the Melo Antunes group had already concluded that all of the possible solutions that were likely to emerge--including the appointment of Azevedo to succeed Goncalves--were unsatisfactory. A spokesman for the group claims it is "almost certain" it will set up headquarters in the north and

--openly declare its intent to rid the government and the military of all Communists

--demand the dismissal of the Revolutionary Council and the Goncalves government

--launch a military operation toward Lisbon to "push the Communists into the sea."

3. The group claims to have the support of General Carvalho, chief of the internal security forces.

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4. These intentions are similar to a previous plan the Antunes group intended to implement if its August 7 manifesto was not accepted in four days. Antunes implicitly threatened a march on Lisbon on Tuesday when he announced he was going to Coimbra, headquarters of the Central Military Region. This trip never materialized.

5. In recent weeks it has appeared that the Portuguese propensity to procrastinate was endless, but at this juncture the Antunes group will probably have to move or give up any hope of directing Portugal's future. Goncalves' appointment is particularly objectionable to them, since Goncalves would be in an ideal position to purge them. The first step in this process could come next week when the Armed Forces General Assembly meets to discuss the "revamping of the Revolutionary Council."

6. A military move to topple the regime will require more daring than Antunes and other anti-Goncalves officers have shown so far. They have information that the Communists and their allies include 15,000 well-armed supporters, which increases the likelihood of a confrontation turning into civil war.

7. Although Antunes is thought to have a majority of the military in his camp, it has never been clear whether this support extended to the use of violence. The performance of the military in previous crises would indicate that many of them could easily be convinced that the Azevedo government should be given time to prove itself. Antunes' strongest support comes from General Charais, commander of the Central Military Region, whose troops have been on maneuvers all week and who has made strong statements about not letting Portugal fall under another totalitarian regime. The bulk of the military forces in the northern region are also thought to be pro-Antunes.

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8. Reaction in both the Azores and Madeira to a move to oust the present government and carry out a purge of the Communists would be overwhelmingly favorable, both among the people and the islands' military. We believe there is small likelihood that the independence movements in either place would immediately take advantage of the situation to make a unilateral declaration of independence if the Antunes group appeared to have a good chance of success. But if the tide turned against Antunes, or the struggle were protracted, such declarations could come swiftly, particularly in the Azores, where plans for such a contingency are further advanced.

9. The Intelligence Community is keeping the situation under close watch; collectors have been alerted to increase their coverage. This memorandum was prepared by CIA. In view of the pace at which events are now moving, we have not attempted to obtain formal coordination within the Community.

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Vernon A. Walters
Lieutenant General, USA
Acting Director